

National Museums and Museums of Modern Art in Poland – Competition for Domination in the Field of Museums

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The objective of this paper is to analyse the transformations in the field of museums in Poland, and to study more closely the process of constructing a museum model that meets contemporary challenges. Two types of museums are analysed here, namely national museums and museums of modern art, to demonstrate how their respective activities affect the structure of the field in question, bringing about change. It is the assumption of this study, following Pierre Bourdieu's framework of conflict perspective, that museums situated in the field of orthodoxy and the ones in the field of heterodoxy compete within the artistic field for a symbolic domination over other participants. At the core interest of this study, there is a question to what extent chosen Polish museums and staff apply the principles of the New Museology in their daily practice.

Key words: modern art museum, museum field, national museum, Pierre Bourdieu

Introduction

While considering the status of the museum in the contemporary world, both museology theorists and practicing museologists draw attention to the new social-political context in which museums now operate in (such as the blurring distinction between the high and the popular culture, or culture and commercialism). These circumstances call for a debate on the new role of museums in the postindustrial society¹. New Museology has become the symbol of challenges currently faced in this field. The old museology was focused on methods, neglecting the social context of functioning, with all attention consumed by administrative tasks and the achieved "success", i.e. sufficient funding and high museum attendance. No reflection, however, was made concerning the social and political effects of museum operation². Critics of this paradigm drew their inspiration from the activity of artists who in the 1960s began demonstrating their lack of trust towards the institution of the museum, demanding more influence over constructing and structuring the exhibition space³. In the 1990s, some publications introduced the critical theory into English language museum studies. They emerged in response to the

¹ WITCOMB, Andrea. *Re-Imagining the Museum. Beyond the Mausoleum*. London, New York : Routledge, 2003, p. 13.

² VERGO, Peter. Introduction. In: VERGO, Peter (ed.) *The New Museology*. London : Reaction Books, 2006, pp. 3-4.

³ MARSTINE, Janet. Introduction. In: MARSTINE, Janet (ed.) *New Museum Theory and Practice. An Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006, p. 6.

ideas of authors like Pierre Bourdieu⁴ and Michel Foucault⁵. According to the assumptions of this critical theory, museums classify and order knowledge, produce ideologies and discipline societies, moulding pure taste. This approach questioned the view of the museum as a neutral institution that had previously been in operation and infused the debate on museology with a new language.

Thus, debate over the main objectives of the contemporary museums was prompted and encouraged. The gradual shift from an “object-centred” paradigm to one highlighting the role of the recipient may be followed both in the literature of the subject, and in the main documents issued by the major museum associations worldwide (such as the International Council of Museums – ICOM). It was almost universally accepted that museum’s essential function consists in its service to the society, whereas the former policy had placed priority on the collection as such and its protection⁶. Currently, the largest challenge museums are faced with is to build a relationship with the active and demanding visitor.

The process of constructing a museum model adequate to the challenges of the contemporary world is also taking place in Poland. Multiple museums are striving to break with the cliché of an anachronous institution that is out of touch with contemporary trends and operates outside the social context⁷. The objective of this paper is to diagnose to what extent the worldwide discourse concerning the condition of museums, and the attempts to include them in the cultural mainstream is present in the collective consciousness of Polish museologists. The starting point of the study rests in the assumption that the postulates of the New Museology may be put into practice in varying degrees depending on the museum type (factors for consideration should include the specificity of its collection, the venue itself and the scope of its activity, its audience, its finances, its history, and its time of operation). Hence, two types of museums are analyzed here, differing in their potential and extent to which the new policy of museum functioning may be applied, namely the Polish national museums and the Polish museums of contemporary / modern art⁸. Due to their long-standing tradition and by the virtue of championing the dominant national values, the national museums in Poland are assumed here the dominant institutions, whereas the Polish museums of contemporary art, being relatively new participants in the power game within the artistic field, stand for the heterodoxy field. It is assumed here that according to the theoretical postulates of Pierre Bourdieu’s conflict perspective, the museums in the orthodoxy field (that is the dominant institutions, e.g. the national museums) and those in the field of heterodoxy (the dominated institutions, e.g. the museums of modern art) compete against each other within the museum field for symbolic domination over the other participants. Each party, bearing in mind their interests, the type of capital they have at their disposal and which they may turn to their advantage and use as a stake in the game, strives to gain the supremacy over other players in the field to be able to impose its definition, and set the boundaries within which the effects of

⁴ BOURDIEU, Pierre. *Distinction. A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1996; BOURDIEU, Pierre – DARBEL, Alain (with SCHNAPPER, Dominique). *The Love of Art. European Art Museums and their Public*. Oxford : Polity Press, 1991.

⁵ FOUCAULT, Michael. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. New York : Vintage Books, 1995.

⁶ WEIL, Stephen E. From Being about Something to Being for Somebody: The ongoing transformation of the American museum. In: SANDELL, Richard – JANES, Robert, R. (eds). *Museum Management and Marketing*. London, New York : Routledge, 2007, p. 32.

⁷ WITCOMB, ref. 1, p. 13.

⁸ The terms of „modern art” and „contemporary art” are used interchangeably here, as both are invoked in the names of the Polish museums.

certain types of capital are revealed. The action strategies assumed by the users depend on their position within the field and its perception⁹. The position occupied in the field, understood as a network of objective relationships between various positions, determines the current and the potential situation of an individual within the distribution structure of given capitals¹⁰.

The presentation of the transformation in the field of Polish museums is preceded by an analysis of the context within which museums in Poland exist and operate, as well as a description of the changes that have recently occurred in this area.

Museums in Poland after 1989

When situating Polish museums in the context of the world museology, their unique history over the past several decades must be kept in mind. Prior to 1989, the structure of the art field was predominantly determined and regulated by both the political situation and the state policy resulting from it. Influence was exercised over the subsystems of the artistic world, including the institutions related to creation, distribution, presence and reception¹¹, by defining the field's boundaries or frontiers, the rules governing it, and managing the resources enabling the actors' activity. State patronage existed to fulfill one of the obligations of a socialist state, namely fostering culture¹².

The central monopoly on fostering the cultural life began to wane with the political transformation of 1989. Over the next few years, the majority of museums was passed over to the local authorities. Currently, in respect to their governing bodies Polish museums may be classified as belonging to one of four groups: state-owned, local government-owned, co-owned (where both state and local authority have stakes in it), and ones run by other bodies (such as universities, associations, foundations, legal and natural persons)¹³.

Once the strategy of providing centrally governed support for culture had been abandoned; Polish cultural institutions were faced with a new activity potential, yet simultaneously also with challenges previously unknown to them that western museums had already been tackling for some time. The new quality of operation was in the Polish territory laid out by the change in the system of museum funding, commercialising the cultural offer, the necessity to court public attention, and, finally, the rapid growth of new technologies which laid grounds for redefining exhibition space, providing new ways to construct it. It should also not be overlooked that owing to the largely homogeneous character of the Polish society, Polish museums are to a much lesser degree concerned with the policy of multiculturalism and managing the relationships with cultural minorities than it is the case for museums operating within multicultural societies.

Prosperity of Polish museums has risen dramatically since the early 2000's, with new museums being established and new investments with the objective of modernizing old institutions underway. The starting point for the so-called museum boom seems to have been the launch of the Museum of Warsaw Uprising in 2004. This particular museum is part of the

⁹ BOURDIEU, Pierre – WACQUANT, Loïc. *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*. Chicago : The University of Chicago Press, 1992, pp. 98-101.

¹⁰ BOURDIEU, Pierre. *The Rules of Art. Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*. Stanford California : Stanford University Press, 1995, p. 231.

¹¹ GOLKA, Marian. *Sociologia kultury*. Warsaw : Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, 2007. p 274.

¹² KRAJEWSKI, Marek. *Strategie upowszechniania sztuki w Polsce w latach 1956-1989. Na przykładzie Galerii Krzywe Koło, Galerii Foksal i Gruppy*. Ph.D. thesis, formerly unpublished, Poznań, 1997.

¹³ FOLGA-JANUSZEWSKA, Dorota. *Muzea w Polsce 1989-2008. Stan, zachodzące zmiany i kierunki rozwoju muzeów w Europie oraz rekomendacje dla muzeów polskich. Raport opracowany na zlecenie Ministerstwa Kultury i Dziedzictwa Narodowego, jako jeden z Raportów o Stanie Kultury*. Warsaw: Ministerstwo Kultury i Dziedzictwa Narodowego, 2008, pp. 5-6.

historical policy of the state intending to enhance its role in honouring and commemorating its past. The list of similarly-aligned, newly-established museums includes The Museum of the Second World War in Gdańsk, the European Solidarity Centre in Gdańsk, and the Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw.

In parallel to the processes of commemorating the past through establishing new museums, Poland has recently seen a growing interest in contemporary art. The initiative that spurred, or at least gave new momentum to acquiring the collection of contemporary art was the National Programme for Culture “The Signs of the Times” (“Znaki Czasu”), operated between 2005 and 2013 and aimed at fostering artistic creation, its collection and cataloguing, as well as promoting contemporary art¹⁴. Its tangible effect was the establishment of over a dozen of regional Societies for the Encouragement of Fine Arts, whose role is to collect Polish art from the break of the twentieth and the twenty first century¹⁵. “The Signs of Times” programme is not the sole initiative for the promotion of contemporary art in Poland, as new museums accruing collections of modern art have recently been started in Warsaw, Wrocław and Kraków.

Also, a number of small-scale, private owned museums frequently started by aficionados of given topics or issues, have lately come to exist, unaffiliated to any source of public funding.

Apart from new museums being founded the previously existing institutions are being extended (e.g. Schindler’s Factory has been started as a new chapter of The Historical Museum of the City of Kraków) or modernized (for instance the new building of the Silesian Museum in Katowice, erected on post-mining grounds).

Museum-related discourse in Poland

Critical reflection on museum institutions has been a part of Polish museology discourse since the 1960s, with the key personalities including Ryszard Stanisławski, the long-term Director of the Museum of Art in Łódź (1966-1991) and Jerzy Ludwiński, an art theorist and critic¹⁶. According to Stanisławski, the museum’s function consists in constituting a “critical instrument” whose purpose is to update art through its constant critical reinterpretation¹⁷. Ludwiński, in turn, formulated a model according to which the museum ought to be “*the place where art is born, both art’s sensitive seismograph and catalyst*”¹⁸. As the author of the programme outlined for the Museum of Current Art institution (Muzeum Sztuki Aktualnej) planned in Wrocław in 1966, he suggested extending the range of issues raised by museum beyond the themes determined by the museum collection. He denied the museum collection its vital status, postulating the establishment of a platform for “*ideas and reflections directed towards future, concerned with the art created in a given time*”¹⁹.

¹⁴ *Strategia Rozwoju Kultury w Regionach. Narodowy Program Kultury „Znaki Czasu” na lata 2004-2013*. Warsaw : Ministerstwo Kultury, 2004, p. 19.

¹⁵ SACIUK-GAŚOWSKA, Anna. Znaki Czasu – docenianie sztuki. In MUSIAŁ, Grzegorz – SACIUK-GAŚOWSKA, Anna (eds.) *Na zachętę do muzeum. Kolekcja łódzkiego Towarzystwa Zachęty Sztuk Pięknych*. Łódź: Muzeum Sztuki, 2014, p. 28.

¹⁶ ZIÓŁKOWSKA, Magdalena. Muzeum krytyczne to nie dyskursywny ornament. Rozmowa z Piotrem Piotrowskim. In: *dwutygodnik.com Strona kultury*, vol. 58, 2011, no page numbers available for this position.

¹⁷ VELEZ, Marcel Andino – FUDALA, Tomasz. Trzy przestrzenie Muzeum Sztuki. Rozmowa z Jarosławem Suchanem, dyrektorem Muzeum Sztuki w Łodzi. In: *Muzeum*, vol. 3, No. 1, 2008, pp. 5-7.

¹⁸ LUDWIŃSKI, Jerzy. Muzeum Sztuki Aktualnej we Wrocławiu (koncepcja ogólna). In: *Muzeum*, vol. 3, No. 1, 2008, pp. 22-23.

¹⁹ ZIÓŁKOWSKA, Magdalena. Czuly sejsmograf. Muzeum Sztuki Aktualnej Jerzego Ludwińskiego. In: *Muzeum* vol. 3, No. 1, 2008, pp. 2-4.

The theoretical considerations found their application with the critical museum project attempted between 2009 and 2010 by Piotr Piotrowski, the Director of the National Museum in Warsaw. He held the museum model he fostered to constitute a certain antidote against the advancing transition of museums into mere tourist attractions with inevitably a “dumbed down” message. The critical museum is synonymous with the museum forum, one that is involved in the public debate concerning problems important for a given community. This is also an institution, in Piotrowski’s words, “*that advances dispute-based democracy, yet also a self-conscious and self-critical one, ever bent on reviewing its own lore, weighing its own authority and the historical and artistic canon it helped to shape.*”²⁰.

The critical museum programme implemented in the National Museum in Warsaw was tailored to meet the requirements and needs of that particular institution²¹. Piotrowski stressed the importance of three areas of activity. First, focusing the attention on the art of Central and Eastern Europe as “*the threshold for building a global vision of museum culture*”²². Second, allowing the museum staff to question and dispute the artistic canon, and making an attempt at embracing works situated outside the canon. The third dimension was to become active within the public space, understood as rooting the museum in the context of the transformations at work in the contemporary world, including “*the democratization of the society, advancement of cosmopolitan culture, European integration, interlapping and mutual permeation of global and local factors, etc.*”. From this particular museum’s perspective, this was supposed to consist in “*facilitating the understanding of the contemporary world’s complexity, acknowledging the importance of memory and the past for building a civil society, a transnational (cosmopolitan) society, one that is internally complex*”²³. Piotrowski was not able, however, to enforce the idea of the museum as a critical institution, as towards the end of 2010 he resigned from the Director’s post, following the rejection of his proposals laid down in the “Strategy for operation and development of the National Museum in Warsaw” (2010 – 2020)” by the museum’s Board of Trustees.

A reflective analysis of museum practices, this time on the part of artists themselves, may also be exemplified by the exhibition held at the break of 2006 and 2007 by the Museum of Art in Łódź. The invited artists presented, among other things, the issues they had with museum as such. Their task was to address typical museum activity, including the display, collection, and interpretation, all of which they held not to be transparent enough, thereby facilitating abuse of meaning and market manipulation. The feasibility of constructing a symmetrical relationship between the artist and the museum, where the interests of the two parties are not mutually threatening was the focus of the project²⁴.

The 1st Congress of Polish Museologists held by NIMOZ in 2015 was organized to meet the community’s need for a more thorough reflection on the status of museums. According to its organizers, “*The Congress was born from the need for a dialogue with the contemporary society and the decision makers concerning the role and the significance of museums in today’s world. It is aimed at outlining the directions and the principles for the development of Polish museology*”²⁵.

²⁰ PIOTROWSKI, Piotr. *Muzeum krytyczne*. Poznań : Rebis, 2011. p. 9.

²¹ PIOTROWSKI, ref. 21, pp. 67-138.

²² PIOTROWSKI, ref. 21, p. 73.

²³ PIOTROWSKI, ref. 21, p. 72.

²⁴ LISIEWICZ, M. Pożądane muzeum. In: LUBIAK, Jarosław (ed.) *Muzeum jako świetlany obiekt pożądania*. Łódź: Muzeum Sztuki, 2007, pp. 10-11.

²⁵ <http://kongresmuzealninkow.pl/misja-i-zalozenia/>

The three-day debate turned out drafts of 8 resolutions later passed over to the representatives of legislative and executive authorities. The resolutions pertain to the nature of museum institutions, museum artifacts and collections, the museologist profession, the museum organizers, the principles of the museums' economic security, the principles of professional and scientific advancement of museologists, the policy for obtaining and protecting collections, the processes of digitalizing the collections held in Polish museums, and the principles concerning the restitution of artifacts.²⁶

Methodology

The objective of this paper is to reconstruct the status of the museum institution in the contemporary culture ingrained in the consciousness of the museum professionals. The main actors of the sociological considerations are the museum employees²⁷, thus individuals directly involved with adjusting and executing the policy of museum functioning. This choice stemmed from the assumed museum definition as a formal institution in the field of art, understood as an organized team of people “*playing certain social roles, and their behaviours of public significance, interactions, consciousnesses, means and norms of operating, with all this aimed at reaching given objectives*”²⁸. It is the assumption here that museologists work in a given social context determined by the processes of the cultural change and are affected by the current scientific discourse related to museology. Also, it is assumed in this paper, that implementing the ideas of New Museology in daily practice is largely dependent on the specificity of a given museum, and more precisely on their situation within the museology field, whether they are participants of the orthodoxy (as is the case with the national museums), or the heterodoxy field (the contemporary art museums).

The traditional museum model operating within the orthodoxy field is compliant with Pierre Bourdieu's theory of reproduction of cultural domination²⁹. According to this approach, museums are responsible for producing and reproducing social differences by validating the so called legitimate culture. In their research, Bourdieu and his followers, including Paul DiMaggio³⁰, explored how museum institutions naturalize the high culture. Their purpose was to reconstruct the process of the higher classes' struggle for social domination through art. The contemporary museums which operate in accordance with the traditional model strive to remain unaffected by their visitors or recipients, and by the mechanisms of the free market, reproducing in their daily practices the established, petrified patterns of operation, and try to ensure that the “museum templum” status is maintained, with its air of scientific authority. It is the assumption of this study that the museums rooted in the traditional model are the national museums, whose role since the very beginning was to legitimize the governmental authority through representing the dominant national values and acquiring artifacts important for the national identity.

²⁶ <http://kongresmuzealnikow.pl/projekty-uchwal/>

²⁷ More specifically, professional museum staff, thus, as the Museum Act of 1996 stipulates, the staff employed in posts directly related to the museum's primary activity.

²⁸ GOLKA, ref. 11, p. 273.

²⁹ BOURDIEU, Pierre. *Distinction...*, ref. 4.

³⁰ DIMAGGIO, Paul. Cultural Entrepreneurship in Nineteenth-Century Boston. In: DIMAGGIO, Paul (ed.) *Nonprofit Enterprise in the Arts. Studies in Mission and Constraint*. Oxford, New York : Oxford University Press, 1986, pp. 41-61; DIMAGGIO, Paul. Cultural Boundaries and Structural Change: The Extension of the High Culture Model to Theater, Opera, and the Dance, 1900-1940. In: LAMONT, Michele – FOURNIER, Marcel (eds) *Cultivating Differences. Symbolic Boundaries and the Making of Inequality*. Chicago : University of Chicago, 1992, pp. 21-57.

The museums which operate according to the paradigm of New Museology transgress the boundaries traditionally associated with institutions operating within the museum field and open themselves to the areas of culture previously absent in museums' spectrum of activity. They go beyond the established clichés of museums as noble temples of art. Inspired by the audience's expectations, they supplement their offer with elements of entertainment, their message is not based on a paternalistic authority, they allow the receiver to construe an individualized narrative, they also form close relationships with the field of economy. Their attempt is to construct the museum space in such a way that it can become a platform where an exchange of thoughts, negotiation of meanings, reception and interpretation of works of art occurs, a space open to other cultures, discourses, ways of construing meaning. It is the assumption here that the Polish museums of modern art, operating within the field of heterodoxy, are able to implement such policy to a larger extent than the national ones. The difference between these museums rests, among other things, in the distinctive character of their collections, as the elements of the national heritage exhibited in the national museums are sacralized and mythologized in the social consciousness, whereas the museums of contemporary art acquire art stereotypically perceived as hermetic, obscure to an average recipient. Moreover, the national museums maintain and reproduce the traditional division of roles within their hierarchical structure, with the dominant role played by the art historian, a hierarchy shaped at the break of the eighteenth and nineteenth century, whereas the representatives of the museums of modern art are advocating the acknowledgement of the curator's profession with the full breadth of duties it currently denotes.

The empirical material was obtained through unstructured interviews. The technique gives access to objective meanings generated by individuals' actions. The interviews were conducted with twelve employees of national and modern art museums³¹. Interviewees were selected based on their position within the organizational structure of the museums, as for each institution, the interviewed employees included the museum director, and a professional staff member within a non-managerial position³². The indicators of the museum model upheld by the museologists are taken to be the objective structures of meaning associated with the following issues: the challenges faced by the contemporary museums, the ways of defining the museum, and social functions played by museums. The empirical material is analysed with use of the Objective Hermeneutics Method.

Analysis of the empirical material

The challenges Polish museums are facing

The collective representations of the studied museology community seem to hold a belief in a historical breakthrough currently taking place in the world of museums, a revolution of a kind the community is witnessing. The literature of the subject refers to the future of cultural institutions as determined by two major factors, namely the technological progress, and the increasing convergence of the culture and the commercialism³³. When enquired about the major opportunities and threats museums are facing in the contemporary world, the respondents

³¹ 6 employees of national museums and 6 employees of modern art museums were included in the research sample. 10 women and 2 men were included in the research sample.

³² 6 directors and 6 professional staff member with a non-managerial position were included in the research sample.

³³ SMITH, Charles, Saumarez. Museums, Artefacts, and Meanings. In: VERGO, Peter (ed.) *The New Museology*. London : Reaction Books, 2006, pp. 6-21.

spontaneously pointed to three areas: museums being used instrumentally for the sake of economic policy, the lack of sophistication on the audience's part paired with the expansion of the leisure time sector, and technical and logistic problems (such as adjusting the museum infrastructure as to be able to host large temporary exhibitions). Clearly, the respondents hold a negative representation of the context they operate within, as the answers they provided to the open question all focused on adversities.

The representatives of the contemporary art share the belief in the necessity of redefining the structure currently existing within the museum field, owing to the specificity of the contemporary art which affects certain daily museum practices in two ways in particular. First, work in a museum of contemporary art typically involves a close collaboration with the artists, hence the respondents are actively advocating an amendment to the Museum Act of 1996, demanding that the curator post (currently not included) be entered therein. They share the conviction that the present statutory regulations concerning museologists as a profession fails to be consistent with the reality of contemporary museum work. The museologist profession as referred to in the act does not include curatorship, a multifaceted position spanning different areas of responsibility, one that involves overseeing and devising an exhibition as a whole, from the initial stage of reaching out to an artist and developing the idea for the exhibition content-wise, to securing the financing of the exhibition, and finally to arranging the exhibition space. The museologists also question the existing structure of the field in respect to conservation work as regards to contemporary art. The latter transgresses the model of art wherein only "noble" materials, such as oil paints, marble, wood, bronze, etc. were used. At times, the contemporary art goes as far as to reject the material dimension of a work of art as such (conceptual art, performance art)³⁴. The previously applied conservation and maintenance practices have proven insufficient and inadequate when confronted with the new philosophy of art.

The museologists' statements also contain an objective structure of meaning concerning the relationship between the museum practice and a wider social-political context, including the new forms, ways and patterns of participating in culture, and the crisis of authority. The analysis of the empirical material revealed the actors, regardless of their background, to be aware of the threats related to the thoughtless reproduction of activities once effective, yet failing to meet the audience's expectations in the present social and cultural context. Developing new efficient ways of communicating with the recipients of the cultural offer calls for an immersion in the contemporary, requiring careful observation of external circumstances conditioning and / or accompanying the changes and shifts in cultural participation models. Simultaneously, the respondents stressed the need to strike a balance between heeding the audience's expectations that might prompt a populist cultural offer, and formulating a "message supreme" developed by the professionals and subject to natural evolution.

The above declarations remain in conflict with the perception the actors have of their peer community. On the level of representation, their perception is unfavourable, with some of the respondents negating the existence of a collective museologist identity. In their own shared view, museologists constitute an extremely stale and conservative professional community,

³⁴ RUBIO, Fernando Domínguez – SILVA, Elizabeth B. Materials in the Field: Object-trajectories and Object-positions in the Field of Contemporary Art. In: *Cultural Society* vol. 7, No. 2, 2013, pp. 161-178; BARKER, Rachel – SMITHEN, Patricia. (2006). *New Art, New Challenges: The Changing Face of Conservation in Twenty-First Century*. In: MARSTINE, Janet (ed.) *New Museum Theory and Practice. An Introduction*, Oxford : Blackwell Publishing, pp. 86.

fervently opposed to any changes that could affect their daily work.

In the respondents' perception, the public commonly shares similar associations of traditionalism, archaism, conservatism, and staleness as pertaining to their profession. Some respondents place the blame for perpetuating the unfavourable and unfair clichés with themselves and their peers. They share the conviction that the museologists fail to initiate or provoke heated social debates or engage themselves in a broad promotion of the actual museum image. As reasons for the perpetuation of the common stereotypes regarding museums, they point to the educational shortcomings of the potential recipients, and their lack of positive museum-related experiences. Those in charge of management in the museums of contemporary art have also raised the fact that the Polish audience is simply unprepared for the reception of contemporary art, owing to the low level of art-related school based education, failing to raise and mould aesthetic sensitivity and awareness, form the need to experience art on a regular basis or even at all, or explain its role, thereby contributing to the formation of commonly shared clichés of the inaccessibility and obscurity of the message conveyed by the contemporary art.

Ways of defining museums

The analysis of the provided statements has shown respondents to reproduce two different museum definitions, namely as a public institution, and in a more reflective manner, where the boundaries stipulated in the legislating act are transgressed. The first definition identifies museums with a state-affiliated institution, operating within a given organizational and legal context, with the Museum Act setting forth the range of liabilities, obligations and rights. The Museum Act of 1996, Article 1, determines the prime objective of museums' operation to be *“collecting and ensuring permanent protection of assets representing the natural and cultural heritage of the humanity, both material and non-material in character; providing information concerning the value and the content of the gathered collection; propagating the basic values of the Polish and world history, science and culture; shaping the cognitive and aesthetic sensitivity; facilitating the access to the collected artifacts”*³⁵.

The interviewees understand the significance of the document, yet the representatives of the modern art point to the confining role of the statutory museum definition. Strict adherence to the definition embedded in the act results in passivity on the part of museology professionals, and paves way for a certain attitude and manner of thinking about the museum the actors reproduce in their social practices. The statutory regulations emphasize the continuity and invariability of the key tasks of the museum and deny an individual any autonomous agency.

The representatives of the modern art go beyond the definition set forth in the act, trying to ground their own in a symbolic meaning. They highlight the role the museum plays in building a platform for dialogue and forging relationships between individuals who are to various degrees involved in the museum's activity. This way of defining the museum is consistent with the vision of the museum advocated by the supporters of the New Museology. The actors representing the contemporary art, regard not only works of art per se as valuable, but also the ideas that have accrued around them, and the experiences (not limited to visual ones) they may help to convey. Nonetheless, the representatives of the museums of modern art also rely on to the legal stipulations as the basis for their own definition of the museum, both on national and international level. Therefore, in the collective consciousness of the respondents representing the various museum types, there is the normative coercion to undertake such museum practices

³⁵ JOURNAL OF LAWS, 2012, Item 987, Art. 1, The Museum Act of 1996.

as to correspond with the entirety of the tasks set out by the legislator, even though they report the equilibrium to have recently been tipped to the advantage of the educational function.

The representatives of the national museums and of the contemporary art museums alike, when expressing their own definitions of museums, pronounce the need for an adjustment to the changing world, but only to a degree that would allow them to maintain the collection as the focus of the museum's existence and operation. As museums act as the depositaries of the material and non-material cultural heritage, abandoning the collecting practice would result in the blurring of the distinction between museums and other cultural institutions.

The neglect of the subjectivity of the recipients of the cultural offer, however, seems to be the common trait found in the definitions offered by the respondents. The statements reflect the common thought pattern shared by the museologists concerning the relationship of the museum and its audience. The issue of the culture participant is not referred to directly in the definitions offered, yet through referring to one of the statutory tasks of the museum, namely facilitating the common access to its collection. The museologists' attitude towards the recipient seems invariably condescending. It stems from the assumption that the museum has sufficient reservoirs of authority and power at its disposal to impose certain standards of participation in culture (such as expecting the visitors entering a museum to be aware of its "temple of art" status and not to expect tacky forms of entertainment). The authority and power the museum exercises rest in the uniqueness of the museum's collection and in the sense of festivity and special occasion its viewing evokes, as well as in the professional staff capable of arranging congenial yet productive leisure time. Accordingly, the museum staff are obliged to devise the offer in such a way, as to facilitate the audience's reception of the works of art. These statements may be taken as acquiescence to treat visitors condescendingly, from an authoritarian position. The preconception is that without the museologist's professional assistance, the recipient is incapable of interpreting the content of the exhibition and its message.

Museums' social functions

The analysed statements of the interviewed museologist community provided in response to the question concerning the main objective of the museum allow a hypothesis that the representatives of the national museums perceive education as the crucial task. Education is understood in accordance with P. Bourdieu's idea of a form of symbolic violence³⁶. The interviewees reproduce the statement that the museum's role is to inspire the recipients to independently develop and enrich their knowledge. They emphasize that learning is a challenging, if not daunting, task, yet a worthy one in its essence. Accentuating the educational mission of the museum, the respondents share the conviction about formal education failing to meet its function. Two other issues surface as the backdrop of the considerations on raising and shaping museum audience. First, the respondents reproduce the statement that the low level of education ought not to steer the museum practices towards populism (for instance preparing exclusively exhibitions that are unsophisticated, congenial and appealing to the public). Second, taking on the role of the educator in respect of experiencing art, or, more broadly, visual culture, may potentially compromise the museum's status as an elitist institution. For the interviewed actors, the museums are institutions producing and reproducing the legitimate culture. Even if the museum is supposed to be a place where leisure time is spent worthily, it does not cease

³⁶ BOURDIEU, Pierre – PASSERON, Jean-Claude. *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*. London, Newbury Park, New Dehli : Sage, 1990.

to be an institution directing its offer at an audience willing to experience art, and accept the dominant narrative message formulated by the museum staff. Based on what they declare, it appears that the employees of the national museums particularly cherish an audience whose habitus does not hinder access to the institutions of culture.

The actors representing the museums of modern art also share the sense of the significance of the educational mission inherent in the museum activity, even though they mostly refer to the unique character of the contemporary art. As their essential task, they see combating the negative clichés the society seems to hold as regards the contemporary art which they believe to be generally perceived as controversial and obscure.

Apart from the educational perspective, the representatives of modern art point to other areas that should stay at the core of the museum's operation. Most importantly, they point to the potential of the contemporary art as a medium for moulding attitudes of social sensitivity and tolerance. The potential is related to the engagement of the modern art in social issues (for instance through commenting current events and issues, taking critical stance on the inherited reality, tackling and disputing various opinions and beliefs, dismantling the model of the world upheld by the media and the politics). The museum's task is also to bring art and the society closer by lending the museum space to discussions and debates, and through publishing.

The actors' attitude towards the cultural canon is the indicator of their understanding of the mission the museum holds in the contemporary world. According to P. Bourdieu's idea, the canon is a form of legitimizing the dominant culture³⁷. The analysis of the empirical material has revealed the idea of the canon to constitute an objectivized element of the museologists' social reality. They share the belief that the knowledge of the canonical works determines an individual's taste and establishes efficient communication between individuals sharing common values. The reproduced statement here is that the canon should primarily play the role of the guide through the world of culture, a function of particular significance in the contemporary world with its unlimited diversity of cultural opportunities on offer for every individual to choose from.

Even though the respondents admit the content of the canon to be fluid and to undergo transformations due to current social circumstances, the majority of them believe that abandoning it would bear adverse effects in the field of art. They reproduce the statement that not all cultural phenomena are equally valuable. The collections accrued in the museums reflect the legitimate culture of the dominant class and claim social acknowledgement. Experts in a given area (art historians in this case) should be able to prevent (through the sheer power of their authority) an inclusion into the canon of works that, in their view, fall short of meeting the criteria of artistic value. The beliefs of some of the representatives of the museums of contemporary art (all of them in managerial positions) who reject the dominant role of the canon in shaping artistic taste, remain marginal. In their opinion, no such universal dominating set of values exists as would justify the existence of the canon.

Conclusions

The analysis of the statements provided by the museologists representing the two kinds of museums, the national museums and the museums of modern art, have shown the Polish museum field to be the site of a power game of its kind, played between the participants of orthodoxy (the national museums) and heterodoxy (the museums of modern art). The

³⁷ BOURDIEU, Pierre. *Distinction...*, ref. 4.

museums of modern art actively participate in the game for the hegemony over the field. The respondents from this group seem to construe their identity through the negation of the museologist community, stressing the peculiar character of the tasks they feel entrusted with – namely, bringing the contemporary art closer to the average recipient to overcome its general perception as hermetic and obscure, and promoting the attitudes of social sensitivity. Another characteristic of the museums of contemporary art is the collaboration with artists, an impossible enterprise in the institutions holding collections of traditional art. The respondents from this group see the necessity for ensuring a strong status of the museums of contemporary art within the structure of the field, owing to the character of the acquired collection, requiring distinctive conservatory practices, differing from the behaviours reproduced within the framework of the institutional training of conservators-restorers.

The common trait of the studied museology community is the manner of constructing their own definitions of the museum. Through them, the respondents address the condition of the contemporary society and the shifting external context that affects museum practices, yet the conceptualizations they offer tend to be conservative and static. The respondents emphasize the state-affiliated origin and allegiance of the museum institution, and invoke the legal foundation stipulating the manner of its operation, even though the representatives of the contemporary art museums attempt to transgress the institutional and organizational framework in favour of more substantial involvement of museums with social life. Nonetheless, the collective consciousness sees the key tasks of museums through the lens of the criteria imposed by legislation, with supremacy assigned to the acquisition of artifacts and protecting the collection.

Despite the declared openness to change, the professional staff see the museum as an institution of symbolic violence. The museum definition reconstructed based on the respondents' statements hardly meets the assumption of New Museology. The definitions the museologists supplied seem to deny the recipient any agency. The objectivized element of the respondents' reality is the perception of the potential museum audience as lacking sufficient resources of cultural capital³⁸.

The analysis of the collected empirical material allows to confirm the hypothesis concerning the existence of a competitive relationship between the national museums and the museums of contemporary art, consisting in struggle for hegemony in the field of museums. The study has, nonetheless, shown the transformations at work within the field of Polish museums not to be dominated by the New Museology discourse. The paradigm of New Museology is aimed at an ideal, whereas every local community needs to determine the feasibility of implementing its assumptions. The economic and political circumstances in Poland differ from those present in the Western context, where the idea of abandoning the recipient's hegemonic subordination to the message conveyed by the museum was originally formed. It may be concluded that the Polish museologist community does not fully embrace the ideas of New Museology, the representatives of the museums of contemporary art being no exception here. The studied community seems to share the belief in the existing willingness to maintain the dominant role consisting in imposing meanings and reproducing the legitimate culture in the museum. The statements the respondents reproduce as regards the status of the museum in the contemporary world seem to situate them closer to the traditional approach to the museum's social functions.

³⁸ BOURDIEU, Pierre. The Forms of Capital. In: HALSEY, A.H – LAUDER, Hugh - BROWN, Phillip – WELLS, Amy Stuart (eds) *Education: Culture, Economy, and Society*, Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997, pp. 46-58.

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